



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL
ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

ROGER BERLINER
COUNCILMEMBER
DISTRICT 1

CHAIRMAN
TRANSPORTATION, INFRASTRUCTURE
ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

**Remarks of Councilmember Roger Berliner
at the T&E Committee Session
on the DEP Office of Sustainability
April 16, 2015**

Global climate change is the greatest environmental issue that we all face. Its solution will depend on efforts from each one of us, from all governments local and global, and all who live on this planet working together to reduce carbon emissions.

In Montgomery County, we have made a commitment to do our part to battle climate change. In 2008, this Council adopted a goal to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 80% by 2050. Now, we stand in 2015, and the most recent report of the DEP's Office of Sustainability shows that emissions from our buildings alone have increased by 5 percent over the last decade. We are headed the wrong direction, and we must turn this ship around. Our goals must not be empty promises, but pledges and commitments backed by strong policies and rigorous implementation plans.

In recognition of the significant work that it will take to reduce our emissions so substantially, our council passed Bill 6-14 to establish two important offices. The Department of General Services' Office of Energy and Sustainability was designed to "green" our county's facilities, and I am pleased that we are showing regional leadership in our commitment to solar and microgrids. The Department of Environmental Protection's Office of Sustainability was designed to show policy leadership on climate issues that would move not just our county facilities, but our county as a whole onto the path of significant greenhouse gas emission reduction.

The 2015 Annual Report shows that the Office is making progress on specific initiatives, but it is not doing enough to push the sustainability conversation forward in our countywide policies and actions. Let me start with the good. Significant efforts are going into education and outreach, and I believe that this messaging is reaching many businesses and residents in our county. Our Energy Program Manager has led a very successful rollout of the Benchmarking Law, and brought onboard many in the business community who started out very skeptical. And I look forward to the continued growth of the Tree Planting and Green Business programs.

But here's what we need to do better in my view. First and foremost, this Office cannot settle for accomplishing a few small bore initiatives. Instead, DEP needs to set a data-driven strategy, with measurable, achievable metrics, for changing the conversation and direction on climate in our county. DEP needs to be, much like the EPA at the national level, the voice of the environment in our county, setting an ambitious policy agenda that helps us achieve our broader goal of a greener, more climate resilient county. My colleagues and I have been more than willing to provide leadership on these issues, but we need a full partner in the Executive Branch to succeed. To the end, I would ask that our

new and excellent DEP Director to step back, look at where we are, and chart a course that will help us get to where we need to be -- reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 10% every 5 years.

Retrofitting existing buildings remains a key focus, and we have adopted good policies in that realm. But one critical policy that we have adopted has been put on hold for years, and that is our Home Energy Loan Program (HELP). The program has been on hold because of strong concerns that were expressed by the Federal Housing Financing Agency. But despite those concerns, local governments in California, including Los Angeles County and San Francisco, have moved forward aggressively. And they are reducing greenhouse gas emissions, reducing energy bills, and increasing local green jobs. And the federal government has not said a peep in protest. We should follow California lead and take this program off the shelf, provide security to the home mortgage community as the Governor of California has done, and move forward. I would like the Director to get back to the Committee in a short period of time and let us know what the Executive Branch has to say on this issue.

Finally, I would like DEP to take a new leadership role in the area of transportation emissions. C-PACE, R-PACE, and the Green Bank legislation that I will be introducing next week will help us to put a dent in those building emissions. But we must do more to measure and reduce county transportation emissions. In the region, our emissions from the transportation sector are going the wrong way. And they are about one third of our emissions. We need DEP to be advocating for stronger policies that will reduce emissions from this sector, policies that focus on reducing vehicle miles traveled.

So, our vision in creating the Office of Sustainability was to empower DEP as a full partner in this important work. We know that taking on such a role may require more staff and more resources. That is precisely why I led our council's to provide resources for two additional staff members last year. It is disappointing, to say the least, that those positions have yet to be filled one year later and undermines our capacity to provide you further resources. That is why I have called for this meeting at this time, before we act on your budget. We need to know what you need to meet the greenhouse gas emission goals that the County Executive and the Council have mutually declared to be ours.